

# The Uniqueness of the Exiles part 2

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please do be seated. And let's pray as we come to God's words. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart.

! I think there are some Bible readings that preachers approach with trepidation as if they may need body armour as they stand in front of the church on a Sunday morning.

And I think maybe this passage is one of them, particularly those first seven verses. I suspect some of you, because it happened up at High Week already, felt your hackles rising as those first words were read.

Wives, submit to your husbands. How dare the Bible say such a thing? What is Peter talking about? But before you take great umbrage and stop listening or head for the doors, let me remind you what Peter is seeking to do in this section of his letter and in the Bible, in his letter as a whole.

You remember, Peter is writing to Christians scattered around the globe, almost all of whom are at this point living in pagan cultures where they are being marginalised, mocked and persecuted.

[ 1 : 26 ] And having spent the first chapter and a half reminding Christians who they are in Christ, that they are now, through Jesus, children of God, heirs with Christ, precious, loved, valued, chosen people who are being built into a holy people and a royal priesthood.

That's who we are. Peter then goes on to remind his readers of their Christian calling to live out that true and glorious identity and walk the way of Jesus.

That's what he's saying. This is who you are. This is how you should live. And so as Christ is holy, so Christians are to be holy. We're to fight those inner battles against sin and temptation.

As Jesus submitted to his Father and humbled himself to serve others, even to death on the cross, so as Christians we are called to submit both to Christ's authority and to one another.

That means we are to live Christianly as citizens of God in this world and as slaves or employees under our bosses, as we saw last week.

[ 2 : 33 ] And as we'll see today, we're to live Christianly as husband and wife in ways that are appropriate to that situation. And if it means that we suffer as we follow Jesus in these ways, then we are to suffer willingly and patiently, knowing that Jesus suffered for us and then ultimately our reward is waiting.

That came up in our gospel reading, didn't it? John 14, 21, whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

And the one who loves me will be loved by my Father and I too will love them and show myself to them. So we obey God out of love. Those who love God will receive and know God's love in return.

And they are the ones who will one day see him face to face. That's our calling and our reward summed up together. And it's in that context that Peter carries on his set of instructions.

That's why he starts with in the same way. In the same way as all Christians are to seek to be model citizens, faithful, reliable employees or slaves.

[ 3 : 42 ] In the same way, for the same reasons, Christian wives and husbands are to live lives of humility, love and submission and service. Firstly to God.

And because of that, then to each other in the way the Bible explains. So Peter starts with wives. So let's start there too, shall we? But let me tell you what he isn't saying.

Okay? Let me deal with some of your instant objections. He isn't saying wives are to be slaves and doormats for their husbands. He's not saying that. He's not saying wives, it doesn't matter if your husband mistreats you or abuses you.

You keep silent and just endure it. He's not saying that. Neither is he saying that women can't have, wives can't have beautiful clothes or expensive jewellery or elaborate hairstyles.

There have been some commentators in the past who have seen that in this passage. It's not what Peter is saying. This is not a bar on anything that looks nice and makes us look nicer.

[ 4 : 43 ] These Christian wives, Peter has in mind, are precious children of God's. They have been purchased by Christ's blood. They are joint heirs with Jesus of the kingdom to come.

To suggest in any way that Peter is saying that wives are some kind of second class citizen is to willfully misunderstand him. Instead, Peter is trying to show us the kind of life and attitude that makes a wife truly beautiful.

Not just to her husband, but to God. And in doing so, he describes the kind of life that actually might end up bringing an unbelieving husband to repentance and faith in Jesus. You see what he gives us the ingredients of that kind of life?

Godly behaviour and holiness, verse 1. A life of purity and reverence, verse 2. The inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, verse 4.

And a willingness to serve and submit within the marriage relationship, verses 5 and 6. Godly behaviour and holiness. A life of purity and reverence.

[ 5 : 49 ] The inner beauty of a gentle, quiet spirit. And a willingness to serve. Does that remind you of anyone? It should do. Because those are exactly the characters that Jesus had and demonstrated and lived out.

That was Jesus. A man of godly behaviour and perfect holiness. Who lived a life of purity and reverence. With a gentle and quiet spirit. And ultimately a great willingness to serve.

As we'll remember in bread and wine shortly. So ladies, if you feel threatened or upset by these verses. Can I ask you to keep that in mind? Keep in mind that if you're a Christian, you now belong to Jesus.

And you're called to model your life on his. That means that you are to deliberately and determinedly seek to grow more like Jesus and act more like Jesus.

That is to be a sign of your devotion to him. It's also the means by which an unbelieving husband or unbelieving children or friends might be brought to a saving faith in Christ.

[ 6 : 51 ] What about Christian husbands? Well, Peter has less to say in terms of words. But I don't think actually it's any less challenging. Despite the rise in feminism, the changes in our society over the last 60 or so years.

There are sadly still far too many husbands who do actually still treat their wives as skivvies and servants. Who rule the roost, sometimes with an iron hand, literally.

And who frankly don't care or don't see anything wrong with anything they're doing. At the time of Peter's letter, that was largely the case across the Greek and Roman worlds. Men were the leaders. Women were of secondary value. Men ruled. Women served. Men commanded. Women obeyed. And to be frank, whether your wife was happy was of little concern to most men at the time.

Peter will have none of that. And neither will Paul, actually, in Ephesians chapter 5. See, that phrase, be considerate, might seem rather weak.

[ 7 : 54 ] But actually, this is another majorly counter-cultural move. Christian husbands are being commanded to take their wives' feelings and desires into consideration. They're to pay attention to them.

They're to seek to bring them joy. To do their best for them. Ephesians 5. Paul goes further, doesn't he? How does he command Christian husbands to behave?

He says, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. How did Jesus do that? By giving of himself completely, totally, even to death on the cross.

You're a Christian husband here this morning. Is that how we treat our wives? Is that how we live our lives in our marriage, I wonder? That's the pattern.

Yes, Peter does speak about wives being the weaker partner. But physically, that is true in almost every case. But notice that Peter calls them partners. Not slaves, not possessions. Again, Peter emphasises the true identity of the Christian wife as a co-heir with her husband in all the blessings of Christ.

[ 9 : 05 ] The pattern for a Christian marriage may have a distinctly divine order to it. Something that might look weird to the world. But according to the New Testament, the Christian marriage is one of mutual self-giving and willing service on both parts.

The husband might be the head, but he's a head who serves, who gives himself for his wife. And men, please remember the end of verse 7. Don't miss that out.

Because if we mess this up, if we behave as kings in our own homes, if we don't love and serve and consider our wives like this, your prayers will hit the ceiling. God will not honour you if you do not honour your wife in the right way.

Maybe you're more offended now than at the beginning. I don't know. You can tell me afterwards. Maybe the thought of Peter giving you instructions on how you should live your life or your marriage is overbearing in the extreme.

So if you're someone who has swallowed the call of our age, that cherishes independence and ability to think for yourselves and make your own decisions, if you find all these commands in this chapter today and the previous chapter all fearfully restrictive, let me just say this.

[10:22] Standing on your own rights, on your ideas, on your independence, determining to live life as you decide is not a Christian way of thinking. You cannot be a Christian and live your life singing, I'll do it my way.

The two don't go together. According to Jesus in John 14, that attitude shown in our reluctance to ignore God's commands will show that we do not in fact really love God, no matter what we say. That we haven't really received God's love and we won't have that certainty of eternal hope. That's a frightening thought. See, if Jesus is our Lord, he must be Lord of every area of our lives.

Our work life, our home life, our church life, our family life, our sporting life, our hobbit life, our married life, and our single life. If Jesus is Lord, he needs to be Lord of all.

And it is a battle to obey him in all those areas. And we're going to find it hard. Of course we are. We're going to battle like the Apostle Paul did with the self that says, I want to do it my way.

[11:33] It will be a battle, but we've got to have the desire that says, I may not do this perfectly, Lord, but I want to try and follow you. Help me to understand and follow your commands.

Now, of course, all that I've said so far, Peter has written for husbands and wives, and many of us here are not now, or maybe never have been, or maybe won't ever be in that situation. But the principles here are just the same, aren't they?

And they apply to all of us. The need to let our characters and behaviour show our beauty and value, not just how we dress, what we wear.

The desire to serve those we spend time with in such a way that they see Christ in us and are drawn to him should be something that we all aspire to. The aim of treating all other Christians with respect, kindness, and compassion, because they are children of God, should be something that marks out all church relationships, not just our marriages.

It should mark us out in every area. And that's where Peter goes next, actually, doesn't he? He says, finally, you be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

[12:47] See, all Christian believers, whether married or single, men or women, of whatever age, position in life, slave or free, rich or poor, working or retired, should aim to live like this.

And boy, wouldn't the church be a better place if we did. But Peter isn't dumb. He is a realist. He knows how hard it is. And so in the rest of the chapter, he moved between reminding us about the ideal of what we should seek to live out and the reality of life.

In the midst of that, he gives sage advice as he goes on. But again and again, he will point us to Jesus and remind us of our new identity and that future hope and our call to witness.

See, Peter knows that although we are called to be perfect, called to be holy as our Father is holy, we are far from that. And actually, out in the world, it's even worse. It's farther from that state.

So he gives a pair of instructions in verse 9 to 12. We are to seek to live holy lives ourselves and we are to respond to the failings of others with love, grace, and blessing.

[13:56] That isn't easy. It isn't easy. Church isn't easy. Churches are full of imperfect people, including those who wear dog collars. We do and say imperfect things.

Sadly, and this won't surprise you, Christians do fall out and argue about sometimes the most inconsequential of things. We can sometimes be rude and impatient, unkind and selfish.

And there's always a danger that that kind of behaviour and attitude may split churches apart. But again, Jesus is our role model. And as we saw at the end of chapter 2, Jesus shows us another way.

What does Peter say there? When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Do you find that hard? I do. I do. When I feel insulted or slighted, I want to say something back. I want to get even.

[15:01] I want to have the last word. No, says Peter. That's not the Christian way. Turn from evil. Do good. Pursue peace. Do right and the Lord will be attentive to your prayers.

And according to Peter, this desire, this way of living usually brings with it the benefits of a quieter life, of a peaceful community marked out by love and joy.

This is the opposite of that other saying. You know the one? Live by the sword. Die by the sword. Peter says here, live a peaceful life and you'll enjoy a peaceful life. Like lots of these sayings, they're generally true but there are exceptions, aren't there?

Peter's been outlining that already. He's already told us that living a counter-cultural lifestyle can actually lead to persecution. However kind and loving and peaceful we might be.

How does Peter say we should respond? Verse 14, but even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear their threats, do not be frightened.

[16:11] What a weird and counter-cultural thought that is. If you suffer for doing good, you are blessed. If you are threatened, don't strike back and don't be afraid.

But of course, we'll only be able to respond like that if we are confident in our identity and hope in Jesus. Maybe that's why Peter continues in the section that starts with verse 15, but in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.

Understand who Jesus is, be rooted in that identity and then always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have but do this with gentleness and respect.

I started last week with the idea that Christians need to be more weird, that we need to stand out to give us a chance to speak out.

And actually, I think responding to threats and harm and insults as Jesus did sets us apart from the world. A godly, Christ-like manner is a tremendous witness that may well lead to questions about why we respond like that.

[17:20] Why didn't you fight back? What is your hope? And when those opportunities come, we must be ready to explain the reason for our hope and to do it clearly and gently.

Rudeness puts people off. Casually dismissing the faith of others as rubbish, fake, demonic, infertile will cause offence and will stop any chance of anyone listening to us.

Hence Peter's call to share Jesus with gentleness and respect. Now, of course, we know, don't we, that Jesus is Lord, that all other religions are false and offer no real hope whatsoever.

But this is where the words of the Christian and the character of the Christian must coincide. We don't want to miss the opportunity to share someone the good news of Jesus because we are crass and unkind.

We need to share Jesus with gentleness and respect. Sometimes, as I've said, those opportunities only come about through persecution. Sometimes we won't get the chance to speak about Jesus until we have shown patient endurance through opposition.

[18:30] And a patient endurance that shows that we really belong to him. And again, Peter points us to Jesus and says, look, this is what he was like. So think about the scene on the cross.

Jesus nailed to the cross between two thieves who are both at the beginning hurling insults at him, the mocking from the crowd and the soldiers all staring.

How does Jesus respond? Well, he doesn't shout back. He doesn't abuse back. He doesn't call down curses. He endures patiently. At one point, he prays for the ones who put him there and they might be forgiven.

And I wonder why, whether that's why the thief on the cross who initially joins in the other guy in hurling insults start at the end, comes around and says, Jesus, remember me.

I wonder if, having seen the way Jesus reacted, how he endured patiently, the kindness and grace that he showed softened his attitude and his mind and thought, there is something different about this guy.

[19:35] I want whatever he's got. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And that same day, that would have been his experience.

And let's not forget what a great salvation Jesus secured for us through his suffering. You and I are fruits of that. We have been brought to and for God through the unjust suffering of Christ.

I wonder if God, our Father, might use our suffering. Our gentleness under fire. Our kindness in the face of insults and injury in the same way. So that people see that and are brought to their senses and attracted to Jesus.

Wouldn't that be something wonderful? Someone who's been abusing us and mocking us sees Christ in us and turns to follow Jesus because of the way we've reacted. the power and impact of Jesus' work of salvation is shown also in those rather strange verses, verses 19 and 20. I don't know whether they stood out to you.

[ 20 : 40 ] After being alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits, to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

In it, only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water. So what on earth is going on here? Bible scholars find the Greek in these words, these verses quite hard to translate. And actually, the ideas themselves are quite difficult to get your head around. As a result, they have led to a wide raft of rather fanciful and strange ideas about what they mean.

I'm not going to give you any of those today. And frankly, I would urge you not to waste your time on the internet chasing down that particular rabbit hole is likely to prove very much unfruitful.

But there are some key ideas in these verses that are worth holding on to. Firstly, that the salvation Jesus offers works both forwards and backwards in history. Forwards to us who might believe today or tomorrow as we proclaim Christ, but backwards to those who've lived in the past.

[ 21 : 47 ] That doesn't mean that Jesus gave those who died in or around or after the flood another chance, but that the preaching of Noah, the man of righteousness, was in its essence the same message that Christ brought.

That means that people who lived and died before Jesus came to faith and were saved when they responded to the signs and prophecies and preaching that pointed forward to Jesus.

The Old Testament believers were not saved because they obeyed the law. They were saved because they trusted the God who would one day send a Messiah. Secondly, it's a reminder that all people need saving, but that the only ark is Christ.

Just as in the time of Noah there was only one boat, so today the only way for people to be saved is to come to Christ. And thirdly, Peter mentions the resurrection of Jesus as proving his truthfulness and trustworthiness.

He ends the chapter with a final encouragement, verse 22, reminding us that Jesus has now gone into heaven and is at God's right hands with angels and authorities and powers in submission to him.

[ 23 : 03 ] How can we as Christians willingly submit to one another and to those in earthly positions of authority? We can endure whatever suffering that might bring about, because God is on his throne and our glorious saviour is sat at his right hand.

Whatever powers and authorities there are now, God is in charge. So the world may seem out of control but Jesus is actually ruling over all things. And one day we will see that which is now a spiritual reality made manifest, physical, in God's eternal kingdom.

One day every knee will bow before him. One day every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And on that day all those insults will end.

All our battles with who rules our life will be over. All persecution will cease forever and we will be made perfect. And then we will know that our labours and our patient endurance have not been in vain.

may we stand firm and live wholeheartedly for Christ our King until that day comes. Amen.